

Leonard takes title as Dur

NOV 26 1980

By Ralph Wiley
Tribune Staff Writer

NEW ORLEANS — Thomas Hearns shook his head in disbelief of the sight, and a woman dripping mink spoke for everyone when she said, "I thought Duran would die before he gave up."

Roberto Duran did not die, or even come close. He merely took the money and ran, laughing back over his shoulder at the fools who stood agape at one of

the strangest two-set plays in the history of boxing, acted out on a cool, full evening at the Louisiana Superdome.

In the first act, Roberto Duran relinquished his WBC welterweight title to Sugar Ray Leonard by literally throwing up his hands at 2:44 of the eighth round. In the second act, WBA welter-champion Hearns publicly called Leonard out, a cry that apparently fell upon deaf ears.

The drama may have a third act. Louisiana State Athletic

Commissioner Emil Bruneau stated Tuesday night that the Commission will withhold Duran's purse until Roberto undergoes medical examinations today to determine if his alleged "cramps" were legitimate.

"The determination of the fight is very unsatisfactory," said Bruneau. "We have the power of suspension. We have an obligation to the fans of New Orleans. That fight could kill our town for six months."

Perhaps Bruneau did not know

that Duran's money is already in an escrow account.

Realistically, the tests should not hold up the purse. Cramps come and go and leave no residue. No doctor can say definitely that Duran did not have them when he said he did. The purse holdup seems to be a mere formality. So was the fight.

It was Duran who started the swirl of controversy by quitting at 2:44 of the eighth round of this rematch. The Panamanian champion, 72-2, had been so-

Duran gives up

lonnly receiving Leonard's swift and angry left jab for seven rounds.

"I started getting cramps in my stomach at the end of the fifth round," Duran said through his interpreter. "I got weaker and weaker. It had never happened to me before.

"No. No more. I am retiring. I don't want to fight any more. Ashamed? Why should I be ashamed? I am a thousand times better than Leonard. I have been fighting for a long time. I am

tired."

"He just quit," said Freddie Brow, one of Duran's trainers. "I couldn't believe it."

Duran's competitive history is such that quitting because of body cramps seems impossible. But quitting merely because there was nothing else to fight for is something else.

Leonard had dominated the fight. Leonard came into the ring dressed in black. His hair was

See FIGHT, Page D-3

uncombed. As the fight began to unfold, it was apparent that unless Leonard made a serious defensive mistake, his flashing jab and ability to get off first with the right hand in close would carry him to the title. But against Duran, such a mistake is always a great possibility.

All three judges had Leonard ahead. Judge Mike Jacobs had it 68-66, Jean Deswert had 68-66 and James Brimmell had 67-66. The Oakland Tribune had it 69-65.

The seventh round might have had a demoralizing effect on the prideful Panamanian. By then, Leonard was feeling his oats. He reverted to Ali tactics, sticking out his chin, shuffling, threatening the bolo punch and saying "Come on, chump, fight."

Duran was incensed, but unable to make Leonard pay. He could not hit the taunting chin, and the bolo and shuffle preceded a lightning-swift flurry by Leonard.

Then in the eighth, the fight calmed a bit. Leonard was back on his bike, zinging an occasional jab and following up with rights. All of a sudden, Duran threw up his hand and began walking back toward his corner. Referee Octavio Meyron did not understand, thinking Duran wanted an equipment correction.

Leonard himself could not believe it. He advanced on Duran, who had dropped his guard and by now was thinking of other things. Leonard hit him once, twice, then raced into a neutral corner and jumped up on the ropes. The title was his again, if a bit tainted by the circumstances.

It was then that Hearn and trainer Emanuel Steward became prime actors instead of just scenery.

"It's a disgrace," said Steward. "Getting all that money like that (Duran was expected to get \$10 million, but a light live turnout, estimated at less than 40,000, and averaged closed-circuit sales may have cut into that), and then just quit."

"Duran just seemed to lose interest. It was like he said 'I've got enough money to last for the rest of my life,' and he just walked away."

The press seemed distraught about the act. It was the people in the \$1,000 seats who had the real kick coming, but most of them were Sugar rooters and they were willing to take

it any way they could get it.

"I don't know why he quit," said Leonard. "I boxed Duran. I'm versatile. He couldn't change. I could. This doesn't take anything away from it for me. I won fair and square. The name of the game this time around was boxing and scientific technique."

"Even my friends were betting against me," said Leonard. "What I did in the seventh round confused him. I did what I had to do. Thomas Hearn? I'll fight him when he reaches the stature of Roberto Duran."

Steward and Hearn were incredulous at this. After all, the Motor City Cobra-Hit Man is a champion, too.

"Oh, my God," said Steward. "And he's supposed to be the champion? Ah man, all this is bull."

Hearn then asked Steward for what was under his coat. Steward pulled out one of those rubber chickens and wrote "To Chicken Ray, from Thomas the Champ" on it. As

Leonard was leaving the interview area, Hearn threw the chicken invitation over Ray's head.

FIRST ROUND — Leonard moves in circles, left and right, scores two jabs and a whistling combination. Duran cannot answer.

SECOND ROUND — Leonard's left gets in four times. When Duran tries to wade through it, two sizzling right leads catch Duran coming in. Leonard is impressive in clinches.

THIRD ROUND — Duran's lunging right scores high and low, but Leonard is still quicker inside. Leonard seems composed, controlled.

FOURTH ROUND — Duran stays on top of Leonard, who is off the bike now. Duran's right counter very effective for points, but not for damage.

FIFTH ROUND — Leonard's left in one, two, three times. Duran bowls Leonard over with a charging push, then scores three times at round's end. Duran seemed to be coming.

SIXTH ROUND — Duran wants to hit and hold, but Leonard's left is tough to get by. Six times it snaps Duran's head back. Duran sneers at the effect, but Leonard is blunting his chase adeptly, circling, circling out of danger.

SEVENTH ROUND — Leonard is the master. All his tricks are working. Duran flails wildly at Leonard's offered chin, but hits nothing but air. Duran does not land a single unblocked blow, while Leonard scores with everything.

EIGHTH ROUND — Duran throws up his hands.

FIGHT NOTES — Duran also is said to have mentioned that his right shoulder was numb . . . Roger Leonard looked like an idiot when he ran into the ring and squared off with Duran after the latter gave up. Duran should have flattened him . . . Richard Burton, Dave DeBusschere, Jayne Kennedy and Ray Charles were among the disbelieving crowd.

Leonard says rematch possible

From Tribune wire reports

LAS VEGAS, Nev. — Sugar Ray Leonard and Thomas Hearns, who had battered each other unmercilessly just 11 hours earlier, met this morning with outstretched hands and smiles for each other.

Leonard, who scored a 14th round technical knockout over Hearns Wednesday night, said negotiations might begin "eventually" for a rematch.

"That will take a lot of negotiating," Leonard said. "I just can't say."

Hearns said he won't rest until the rematch.

"I know I can come back," Hearns said. "If Ray will give me a rematch I know I'll put on a much better show. I know Ray's style now and things will be different the next time."

"You can't win all your fights. The sign of a true champion is to lose and then come back. I'll be back."

The two stood side-by-side at the news conference, both wearing dark glasses to hide ugly bruises. They laughed, shook hands and joked with each other.

Leonard, 31-1 with 21 knockouts, sustained a severely swollen and discolored left eye in the bout, as Hearns' stinging left jabs found their mark in the early and middle rounds. But Leonard rallied, knocking Hearns down in the 13th and continuing the onslaught in the 14th before referee Davey Pearl stopped the fight.

Hearns had also been hurt in the sixth

and seventh rounds, but recovered and won the next four rounds.

"In the sixth I hit him with the combinations and his legs buckled," Leonard said. "I went in for the kill and wanted to take him out there but he proved he can take a punch. He took my best shots then and he took them again in the 13th and 14th."

Leonard, who gave away three inches in height and four inches in reach to Hearns, said it didn't occur to him until they were both in the ring just how big Hearns, 6-foot-1, is.

"I didn't realize until we got into the ring just how big the sucker is," Leonard said. "His size surprised me. He's big!"

"But whenever I step into the ring I feel confident and dominant."

Hearns admitted the 14th round attack hurt him, but said he didn't want the fight to be stopped.

"I wasn't out of it," said Hearns, who was ahead on the scorecards of all three judges after the 13th round. "I knew where I was and what was happening. But I just couldn't recover. My head was still dizzy from one punch when he'd land another. I just couldn't recover and fight back."

Hearns peppered Leonard's face with left jabs from the start, and by the third round the welt appeared under Leonard's left eye. The injury got steadily worse and the eye was nearly swollen shut in the 14th round. Leonard said he had lost "half

to three-quarters" of his vision out of the eye by the 12th round.

"In the second round he hit me a few times and the eye started to swell," Leonard said. "As his jabs kept getting through, the eye kept getting worse. Then I had to change my strategy. I had been trying to outbox him, but had to go flat-footed for the rest of the fight, hitting him with body shots to keep him off me."

Hearns, who entered the bout unbeaten with 30 knockouts in 32 fights, said he was never able to land one of his real sledgehammer rights. Leonard didn't believe him.

"I wasn't able to hit him with my best shot," Hearns said. "I did land some good rights, but not the real good ones. As I'd shoot the right hand he'd move off the left, and that took a lot out of the punches."

Leonard, tipping his glasses down momentarily to show Hearns the extent of the damage to the eye, laughed and shook his head at Hearns' statement.

"I thought the key was the sixth round," said Hearns' trainer and manager Emanuel Steward. "They traded left hooks and Ray came over Thomas' lowered glove and really tagged him. Thomas never really recovered from that punch. That was the biggest punch in the fight."

Steward, who has worked with Hearns for almost a decade, said it was the first time he'd seen his fighter hurt.

"It was real surprising to me," Steward said.

Leonard says he's done all his talking

LAS VEGAS, Nev. (AP) — The meeting with Thomas Hearns was finished, and although he wore dark glasses to hide a badly-bruised left eye and was very weary, Sugar Ray Leonard was the one smiling.

"I proved I'm the best welter-weight in the world," Leonard said Wednesday night after he had won the undisputed title from Hearns on a 14th-round knockout.

"I've done my talking, now you can ask Hearns all the questions."

Leonard, who thus added the World Boxing Association welter-weight title to the World Boxing Council crown he already held, praised his fallen opponent.

"I apologize for saying he had no brains," the champion said. "He's truly a great athlete."

Behind on all three judges cards heading into the 14th round of the scheduled 15-rounder, Leonard finished Hearns 1:45 into the stanza, continuing an assault that sent his foe reeling onto the lower strand of the ropes late in the 13th round.

"I never was afraid I was going to lose, but the fight was getting too close for comfort," said the 25-year-old Leonard, who now has won 22 of his 32 bouts by knockout, with a lone loss coming in the first bout with

then WBC champion Roberto Duran.

Leonard added that he drew strength from critics who had questioned his superiority heading into the richest fight ever.

"I brought it up from my gut, from my heart," Leonard said of the 13th-round barrage that seemed to come from nowhere and turned the tide of the fight. "A lot of people around the world didn't want me to win; I wanted it for Ray Leonard."

Leonard had suffered a bruise under his left eye during a sparring session prior to the fight, and Hearns worked on that part of his face with long jabs. The eye was almost swollen shut in the later rounds.

Leonard again referred to his respect for Hearns, which grew evident when the two, who had been taunting each other in the early rounds, began, instead, touching gloves and nodding following the closing bell of each round.

"I take off my hat to Hearns, and I think he will be in line to do a lot of commercials," Leonard said, apparently poking fun at his own endorsements. "I knew I was in trouble when I signed to fight him."

Asked about a rematch, Leonard responded, "We will have to listen to what they want to say."